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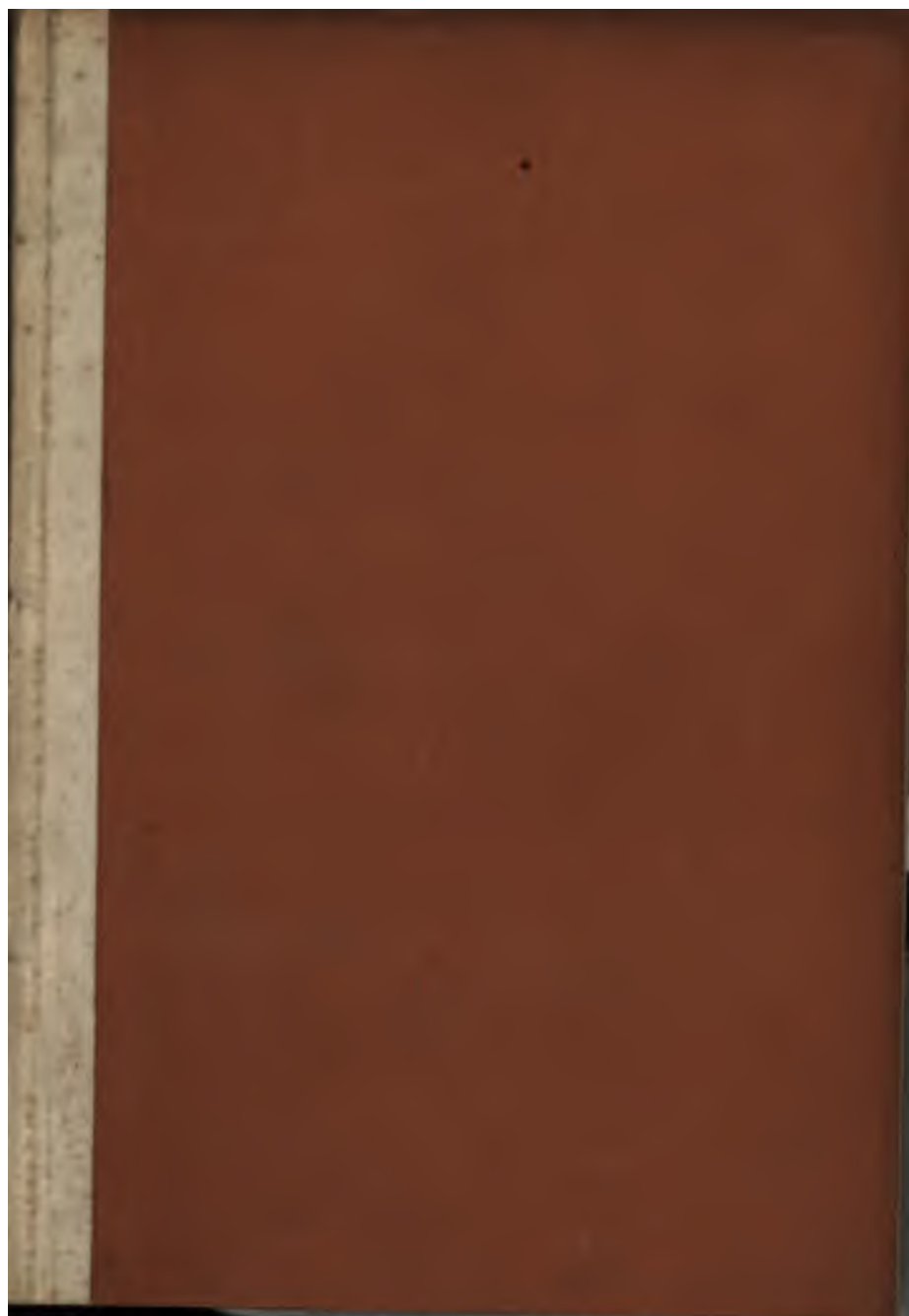
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THE
CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY:

FOUR PASTORAL LECTURES,

DELIVERED IN

BOWDON DOWNS CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

ON THE EVENINGS OF

December 3rd, 10th, 17th, and 24th, 1882.

BY

ALEXANDER MACKENNAL, B.A.

Manchester:

ALEXANDER THOMSON, PRINTER, LLOYD STREET.

1883.

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The following Lectures are pastoral, not polemical. They were not written for publication : but several members of the Congregation being desirous of having them in permanent form, I have transcribed my pulpit notes, so that they may be printed as an appendix to our Church Manual for 1883.

A.M.



LECTURE I.

AGNOSTICISM—SCEPTICAL AND CHRISTIAN.

I have been led to announce this course of Lectures for two reasons : first, because Agnosticism is the prevalent form of philosophic infidelity ; and secondly, because the affectation of Agnosticism exists and is spreading in circles in which many of you move. I do not suppose that many of you will be troubled with Agnosticism as a philosophic system. To understand this requires a critical acumen, and an acquaintance with philosophic terminology, which it is hardly within the power of men and women engrossed with the cares of busy life to acquire. Your perplexities and your reasons for faith are on a very different plane. Enough for those of you who are believers in Christ that you have in yourselves a witness to the truth of your religion : you have listened to the appeals of the gospel, and your faith is warranted by your experience ; you have made the great venture of faith, and God has been faithful to His promises. And, as to those of you who are unbelievers, the causes of your unbelief lie far within the ranges of philosophical discussion : if your hearts were won to Christ and His service, and your wills were responsive to Him, your perplexities would disappear like ghosts in the light of morning.

When, however, we have said all this, we have only touched part of the matter. All systems of thought affect many more than those who have mastered the details of the systems; the sayings of thinkers filter down into the common speech of men, and bring with them their power of aiding or of disturbing religious confidence. Doubt is a religious disease, an infirmity of the soul, as well as a mode of philosophic thinking; the rumour that there are spiritual perplexities haunting society may profoundly trouble some who are never vexed with, cannot even realise, the perplexities themselves. Any Christian minister, who keeps an open mind and sympathetic heart, knows that this is true of the Agnosticism of the time. In hours of pain and weariness, when the heart is sick with anxiety, when a feeling of the vanity of human life steals over the soul, the knowledge that scepticism is widely spread may become a very real terror. At such times men ask their Christian friends—"Are you all walking in a vain shew? Have you reasons for your trust? Do you know the secret of the perplexities which are involving so many in unbelief, and have you found an answer to them? I do not want you to conduct me into the valley of the shadow of death; but I ask you, have you been there? And if so, what did you find there? Was God there? and did His rod and His staff comfort you?" It is to answer such interrogations that I am aiming: not to discuss the whole question of Agnosticism, for which purpose the Christian pulpit is not the place; but to furnish you with some—if but a few—of the reasons why we Christians hold to our faith, notwithstanding what is being alleged against it, and to shew you why we deem *them sufficing*.

Remember, too, that truth, Christian truth, has grown up, and grown ever stronger in battle with difficulties. In trouble we call on God, and He answers us : in times of doubt we examine again the reasons of our faith, and find them even more sufficient than we had deemed. Forms of unbelief have changed and died ; their records strew the history of Christian thought, as skeletons the desert pathway ; but the Christian faith is here, broader, more catholic, more confidently and more intelligently believed than ever. Out of all its battles with unbelief it has emerged triumphant ; and there are not wanting signs that it will come purged and reinvigorated out of its present conflict. We are not conscious of the force of our faith, nor fully aware of its varied array of evidence, until we see how it can defend and assert itself in presence of unbelief.

I have said that the affectation of Agnosticism exists and is spreading in circles in which many of you move. One hears of it at the dinner table ; it is whispered from ear to ear ; lightly, as if a young man had joined the Dramatic Reform Association, or a young woman had become an *Æsthete*, it is said " So and so has become an Agnostic." I want you to see how unworthy is such levity. Agnosticism is a grave enough system : to be an unbeliever is an appalling prospect. The evidences of the Christian faith are at once too weighty and too solemn to receive a cavalier dismissal at the instance of a passing fashion ; its history is too august, the faith which has supported, for nearly 1900 years, saints and thinkers, martyrs, toilers, strugglers, benefactors, has too much *prima facie* reason for consideration to be treated so.

You understand now, I hope, my purpose in these Lectures, and the spirit in which I shall treat my theme. Be grave, be earnest, be fearless in your listening: as I shall be grave, and earnest, and candid in my speech. My object is constructive, not destructive; not criticism of forms of doubt, but the exposition of some reasons for Christian faith.

Agnosticism is the philosophical system which declares that God,—or as Agnostics prefer to say, the ultimate force of the universe—is not, and cannot be, known. It differs from Atheism, which declares that there is no God, in this—it says, whether there be a God or not it is impossible for us ever to know: its practical result is that of Atheism; it reduces worship to an absurdity, leaves us without an object of religious confidence, or expectation of spiritual aid. It differs from Pantheism, which identifies the universe and God, in this—it says, whether there be, or be not, a power distinct from, and ultimate to, the forms of matter and the forces we can measure, we do not, cannot know: it is at one with Pantheism in confining to the system of things we see, and handle, and can measure, all the active thought and large emotion of the human mind. Practically it is identical with Secularism; it repeats, in more reasoned and stately form, the constant assertion of Mr. Holyoake—"The search after God is fruitless: confine your thought and effort to this earthly life which you can understand, and where your influence manifestly tells." Agnosticism aims to supply a metaphysical justification for the positive or secular philosophy. The positive philosopher says "study the sciences, study history, study social life: all else is barren: *metaphysics*, especially, is both a fruitless and a delusive

field to cultivate." Agnosticism studies metaphysics, and affirms the same conclusion ; " it is so from the very nature of the human mind."

To enter into the details of the argument in which this is sought to be established, would demand a course of metaphysical reasoning which would be wearisome to most of you, entertaining, perhaps, to a few of you, but which it would not be very profitable to introduce here. I will, however, try to put the argument in a form which you can readily grasp. All knowledge consists in limitation ; the very meaning of the word define is "to lay down boundaries : " but the ultimate force of the universe defies reduction within any limits which we can assign ; it cannot, therefore, enter within the region in which our human faculties can represent it. In all our knowledge we refer facts to classes ; to know is to reduce our vague conceptions to simpler conceptions : we come at last to that which cannot be simplified ; there is no class to which we can refer the conception of God ; God, therefore, cannot be known.

The first remark I have to make on the Agnostic position is, that, with all its apparent humility, there is a very large assumption at the base of it. It does not hold the judgment in suspense ; it pronounces dogmatically—you cannot know. To affirm that God cannot make Himself known implies knowledge, the knowledge that He is unknowable. To say that the ultimate force of the universe cannot be seen, cannot be comprehended, cannot be reduced to any category of human thought, is one thing : to say that in no way can we receive disclosures of its existence ; that by no means can it be revealed to us of what

kind it is, whether it be intelligent, or not intelligent, whether it be related to our emotions and our moral sense, or not related to them, is another and a very different assertion. Denial demands knowledge equally with affirmation. The Agnostic declares that God is so limited by the minds which He has formed that He cannot reveal himself to them ; that the force of the universe is such in its own nature that no way exists whereby it can be made known.

Observe, again, the large assumption of Agnosticism with relation to the human mind. There is a difference between incomplete knowledge and total ignorance ; this difference is overlooked whenever Agnosticism is made an *a priori* reason for unbelief. Two things are confounded ; that full knowledge of God which only God Himself can possess, and the knowledge of Him, partial indeed, but sufficient for faith and worship, which He may impart to us. There are many things which we do not know completely, but which we know sufficiently to enable us to direct our conduct, justify our emotions, and form our expectations. I do not know the secret of my own personality ; I know enough of my powers for the conduct of life. I do not know the personality of another ; or the sources of that wealth of self-devotion which shews itself as love. When we begin to speculate on the hidden things of human existence, the mode and essence of that human being which each one is, we are lost in a world of inconceivable entities. But we know enough of a wife's fidelity to trust our honour and our happiness in her keeping ; we gather from the words and the conduct of men enough to direct us in our intercourse with them. Be not misled by the use of a favourite word in the terminology of Agnosticism—

unthinkable. A statement may be unthinkable because of incongruities, inconsistencies involved in it; or it may be unthinkable because neither our experience nor our imagination enables us to form a complete representation of it to ourselves. Use the word inconceivable instead of unthinkable; and the spell is broken. Many a thing is inconceivable of which, nevertheless, we may know a great deal. Life is inconceivable; but we know that we live and that men die. A thinking being is inconceivable; but we know that we think, and that we can test the thoughts of others. Love is inconceivable; but thank God, love is not unknown.

Observe, again, how Agnosticism ignores the facts of human history. Into that history religion enters; not as the great delusion of life, but the source of its loftiest aspirations, its most fruitful sacrifices, its noblest achievements both in thought and purpose. Agnosticism closes the search after God, which has been the mainspring of religion, with its *ipse dixit*, "all this is unthinkable." The Christian religion enters into human history. The Christian religion is not, as some would have us believe, a system of thinking whose origin was in the dark ages of the world's primitive traditions; springing up, like all religions, far from the possibility of historical criticism; making its appearance in days when superstition held the place of scientific thought. It came into the world in the light of day. Its origin is within the historic period; it appeared at the dawn of modern history. It is not a collection of remote traditions; it professes to be a record of facts, and can be tested as other records are tested. It has its continuous history and literature; it came from the first into contact

with forms of life and government, and with social conditions, with which we are quite familiar. Its records cannot be dismissed by a mere assertion—"it deals with the unknowable." I say "it deals also with the knowable." Its conclusions appeal to the reason; the facts on which these conclusions rest may be established or disproved. No thinker has the right to oppose to them a metaphysical dogma that the ultimate force of the universe cannot be known. Nor has any one the right to identify Agnosticism and unbelief who has not carefully weighed and earnestly studied the history of the church; the records of Christ's life and words and works, the story of His death and His resurrection from the grave.

I have used the phrase "Christian Agnosticism" in the title of this lecture. I want you to remember that the fact which Agnosticism proclaims,—that it is not for us to conceive the mode of the divine being—is no new discovery, having in it power at once to destroy the faith of the gospel. The Bible is full of assertions of it; we meet with it in all stages of the scripture history; religious faith has not only survived the discovery, it has been ever the basis of a trust which rises to worship, and an awe, a sense of dependence and of security, which are of the essence of religion, but which only faith in God can engender and sustain.

Far back in the early records of the Jewish faith, when the children of Israel were led out of Egypt, and constituted the nation down which the most precious and only living truths of religion were handed to the world; this fact of the *inconceivableness*, the unrevealableness of the essential

nature of God was delivered to Moses. "*And Jehovah said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of Jehovah before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.*"* The truth is presented in a form adapted to an early stage of human culture; but the meaning is clear—we cannot know God as we know one another; but He can reveal Himself to us with an increasing fulness of significance. The Sheikhs who discoursed of the puzzle of the world around the tent of Job knew what our Agnostics know. "*Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?*"† But their perception of the partiality of man's acquaintance with God neither daunted their enquiries nor checked their faith. The Apostle John tells us, "*No man hath seen God at any time.*"‡ Paul puts this truth now in the language of adoration, God dwelleth "*in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see;*"§ again he speaks in the very language of that philosophy which declares "the relativity of human knowledge," "*we know in part.*"|| He speaks, moreover, of "that which may be known" of

* Exodus xxxiii. 17-20. † Job xi. 7, 8. ‡ John i. 18.

§ I Tim. vi. 16. || I Cor. xiii. 9.

God, implying that there is that which cannot be known of Him ; and points us to a knowledge of God which is trustworthy, the product of human reason striving to master the secret of the things which are seen. "*The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead ; so that they are without excuse.*"* Christ tells us that only God can fully know God. "*No man knoweth the Son, but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*"† Yes, it is here, the truth of the unsearchableness of God : but another truth is also here ; God can reveal himself ; He has revealed Himself by and in the Son. That He is we know ; we know His character, His purpose, His will. *He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*"‡ "*The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*"§

All down the Christian history, this truth, of the inconceivableness of God's essential being, has been recognised. Sir William Hamilton enumerates a list of testimonies to the limitation of the human faculties ; and among them are the early fathers, Tertullian, Augustine, Chrysostom and others, who were among the foremost thinkers of their time. They were this ; they were the authors and founders of European civilisation on its moral side ; they were also more. They were strong believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the reality of His mission, the trustworthiness of His revelation. They knew God by direct approach to Him :

* Rom. i. 20. † Math. xi. 27. ‡ John xiv. 9. § John i. 18.

they called upon Him, and He answered them ; they asked for light, and He gave it them. The knowledge they had of Him cleared their speculative difficulties and dispelled their doubts ; in adoration and gratitude, also in the confidence of thinkers who had gone deeply into such questions as are now agitating us, they said "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and we rest not until we rest in Thee."

And many have since found Him ; found Him in the revelation of His Son ; found His answer to their enquiries in the continued enlightenment of their consciousness ; found the witness of His presence in the direction of their lives. The reality of Christian faith, not only as a movement of the human mind, but still more as association with the unseen Spirit, the power we cannot comprehend but can feel and trust, deserves investigation, scientific investigation. Men whose ability as thinkers we cannot doubt, whose freedom from delusion we dare not challenge, whose sincerity is witnessed to by the simplicity and devotion of their lives, are ready to rise and aver,—“ I know God, for I have felt Him. I know Him, for He has answered me when I have prayed ; His promises in Christ Jesus have been fulfilled within my experience.” Christians do not live in a corner ; they are out in the light of day. They have a testimony to offer ; they are ever verifying the truth which they believe. And when men say “ God cannot be fully known ; the unseen ultimate force of the universe can never be defined by man ; ” we reply that this is true. But when they go beyond this and add, “ therefore the Christian religion is vain, and your faith is an illusion ; ” we answer—“ that is not the way in which to deal with facts. ‘ Strike but hear ! ’ Weigh the evidence which history furnishes ; listen to the

testimony which true and sober men can put in. It is neither philosophical nor fair to refuse to admit facts because they do not square with your theory ; nor to examine them with a foregone conclusion that they must be false, because, if they are true, there is room for intelligent trust in God."

I have indicated in these last paragraphs the outline of my course of Lectures. Next Sunday evening I shall treat of the history of the gospel record ; and on the following Sunday, of the contents of the gospel record. And then will follow a lecture on the Christian consciousness, which also is a fact in human history, a fact requiring to be estimated in any complete survey of the Christian testimony.

There is no necessary connection between the recognition of the inconceivableness of the divine being, and unbelief in God. Modern Agnosticism makes vast assumptions ; the knowledge required to warrant them is as large as that knowledge which, it affirms, is not possible to man. But what shall we say of those who, having neither mastered the system of Agnosticism, nor estimated the reasons for Christian believing, quietly assume that Agnosticism has exploded faith, and that judgment has gone against the Christian revelation ? Let it be granted that the Christian religion is founded on faith, faith has its reasons. It is not ignorant, although it deals with what is beyond knowledge. The faith of the gospel, like all the noblest activities of the soul, draws from the unknowable the materials of knowledge ; from what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, it gathers what reason can apprehend and build into the whole structure of the truth. It is not dependent on intellectual acuteness

nor stores of information ; its truths are “revealed unto babes.” But its truths can also commend themselves to the wise ; they are “wisdom to the perfect,” satisfaction to the highest intellect, and nourishment to the choicest powers.





LECTURE II.

THE GOSPEL RECORD—ITS HISTORY.

In my Lecture last Sunday evening I pointed out to you that philosophic Agnosticism is not in itself a sufficient reason for religious unbelief; that the Agnostic is not relieved from the necessity of fully examining and fairly estimating the historical evidences of the gospel. Christianity is not merely a form of human thought, demanding to be tried by its own consistency, and its congruity with the facts of human life. It is this, but it is also more. It has a history of its own; it is the most important factor in modern civilisation; it influences all the social and political questions of our time; its records enter as an integral part into the story of the European nations; and it is possible, it is easy, to understand its beginnings. It had its origin in the blaze of civilisation; it sprang up in one of the highways of the old world; the age of its appearance was not one of the dark ages of superstition, when men were satisfied to refer to the supernatural whatever they did not understand; it was a profoundly critical age, when such problems as we now discuss—concerning the order of nature, the government of the world, man's moral life and destiny—were occupying the attention of the foremost spirits of the time. I purpose to justify these statements in the lecture of this evening; to the development of this argument I invite your attention.

1. Let me first remind you of a few historical facts, which may serve as stepping-stones along which we may pass from the nineteenth to the first century of the Christian era.*

Undoubtedly Christianity is a present fact. The churches of Christ are everywhere; we cannot take up a newspaper without being reminded of the presence and influence of Christianity. Two things, for example, characterise this 19th century of English history—the great activity of the churches in missionary and philanthropic enterprise; and the political struggle, first for religious liberty, and now for the equality of all men, whatever their religious beliefs, in the eye of the law. This 19th century has grown out of the 18th; in which was secured the religious toleration which followed on the Revolution of 1688; and when occurred the Evangelical Revival, which changed the character of English life. The 17th century has, as its most significant incident in England, the religious conflict between the Cavaliers and the Puritans; its greatest literary achievement was the publication of the authorised version of the Bible. The 16th century was that of the Reformation in Europe.

The 14th and 15th centuries were those of the Revival of Art and Literature, out of which grew the Reformation. Printing was invented about the middle of the 15th century: the press began at once to teem with theological literature, and the study of the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible revived. To the end of the period belong Raphael and

* I have borrowed the general idea of this method of illustration from a lecture by Mr. Thos. Cooper—"The Bridge of History."

Michael Angelo, whose subjects were mainly Christian ; and whose perception of Bible history is both accurate and spiritual. The beginning of the 14th century is adorned with the name of Dante, a great Christian poet ; the middle with that of Wyclif, one of the greatest men in English history, in whose writings we see the anticipation of many practical ideas partially realised in the Reformation, and still achieving their realisation.

The study of Architecture alone is a sufficient testimony to the prevalence of Christian sentiment for the three centuries next preceding. Gothic art flourished then, and Gothic art is Christian art. The noble buildings, which are among the chief adornments of England and France, Germany and Italy, were erected largely during these centuries ; and the buildings were Colleges, *i.e.*, Christian Schools, Churches, Abbeys. All through this period, notwithstanding the corruption of religion which prevailed, the Church was the refuge of the downcast, the home of purity and peace, the nursery of honourable and honoured womanhood ; the pride and ferocity of the feudal barons were tamed, and their oppressive power was checked, by the influence of Christianity. The Crusades mark the centuries, from the 11th to the 13th ; and if the misery of the western nations led to these great invasions of Syria, the conscious motive was that of recovering the Christian sacred places and delivering Christian captives. Out of the Crusades developed the spirit of chivalry, which, in a better than its old military form, is the animating spirit of modern society.

The five centuries next preceding,—from the beginning of the 5th to the end of the 10th,—were those during which

the foundations of modern European society were laid : the northern and eastern hordes came down on the Roman Empire ; they shattered its power, possessed themselves of its spoils ; they did more, they settled themselves down, divided themselves into the modern peoples, and made a new world. The Goths seized Rome in the early part of this period ; in the middle part of it the Teuton people awoke to a conscious destiny ; the Scandinavian tribes thrust themselves in, at first a disturbing element in the tumult, but destined to add stability, and contribute a new element, to the complex and catholic civilisation of our own days. The most significant fact in these troubled centuries, their abiding result, is well expressed in the title of one of Dean Merivale's books—“The Conversion of the Northern Nations.” Out of the chaos which prevailed during the earlier portion of this period, we see gradually emerging a new Christian society, founded on a better basis than the old military empires, controlled more and more by loftier purposes, and bringing to the birth “sweeter manners, purer laws.” In three points these Northern nations were superior to the Roman society which they displaced—the widespread slavery, which honeycombed and corrupted the whole fabric of Roman life, did not prevail among them ; they had a passion for political freedom ; their homes were purer, for conjugal fidelity was more revered. And on all these points they found themselves in sympathy with Christianity. They needed to have their old warlike ferocity subdued, not by a military passion more eager and stronger than their own—that could never have done it—but by gentle humanising influences ; they needed to have their old pagan superstitions dispelled by

a strain of lofty spiritual sentiment ; and, by the grace of God, this was accomplished. Few things more beautiful are to be found in our own early traditions than the narratives of the conversion of the Saxon tribes in England. Gradually by the teachings of men of peace, who came to these shores bent on their conversion, the hearts of Queens and their consorts were won ; the Pagan altars were overthrown, cruel rites died out, and the common people began to rejoice in a humaner rule. These centuries are called the dark ages ; because in the incursions of the Northern hordes, classical learning and art were destroyed. But the Barbarians found, even in the corrupt Roman Empire, a power which they could not subdue. There would have been no such modern European history as that in which we now rejoice, if, when the Northern nations shattered the "earthen vessel" of Roman civilisation, they had not found there the divinely deposited treasure of spiritual truth. While the barbarians were still coming down from the North, another power was encroaching on Europe from the South ; Spain and Sicily were overrun by the Saracens. The influence of Arab culture on the thought of Europe has recently been abundantly and ably illustrated. But the power of the Saracens was not moral or spiritual ; it was intellectual merely ; and the result in European history is, that it has decayed, waxed old, and vanished away. A great historical experiment was tried on the stage which constitutes the modern world—intellectual against spiritual culture—and the result was Christendom. The refined and civilised Saracenic power, wanting spiritual elevation and moral force in its religion, has disappeared ; the barbarians, under the influence of the gospel, have made the foremost nations of to-day.

In the 4th century we find Christianity, as in so many of the centuries succeeding it, the mightiest political and historical force of the time. The foremost literary man in the latter half of the century was St. Augustine ; to the first half belong the Council of Nicæa and the controversies on the person of Christ. Among the significant titles of the incidents of the century are such as these : A.D. 361, Julian the Apostate assumed the empire, and Christian martyrdom again began ; A.D. 391, Reign of Theodosius : Christianity once more established and Paganism proscribed. In the early part of the century Constantine was on the throne ; and his conversion was one of the most important events of the later Empire.

The 3rd century was a time of frequent and rigorous persecutions ; yet we are told that the Christians were everywhere : found in numbers in all the cities of the Empire ; in the employment, civil and military, of the state. Tertullian speaks of the spread of the gospel. "Men cry out that the state is besieged ; the Christians are in the fields, the forts, in the islands. They mourn as for a loss that every sex, age, condition, and even rank is going over to this sect." He tells of its propagation by domestic influence, "winning whole families," "advanced by the influence of women," "who as wives and mothers, reflected a light on surrounding corruption." "Every Christian mechanic," says he, "has found God, and can shew Him to you ; and can teach you all you require to know of God, even though Plato says it is hard to find out the Creator of the universe, and impossible, after one has found him, to make him known." "All your refinements of cruelty," says he to the persecutors, "can accomplish nothing ; on the

contrary, they do but serve to win men over to this sect. Our number increases the more, the more you persecute us; the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians."

The 2nd century is the age of the Christian Apologists ; the philosophers of the Empire engaged in controversy with what they now perceived to be, not a Jewish sect, but a new religion. The 1st century is that of the Apostles and of Christ.

In this brief historical sketch I have not touched at all on the corruptions of Christianity ; nor glanced at Christian controversies except as these were conspicuous historic facts. My purpose has not been to give even the shortest abstract of the history of the church, but to choose a notorious fact, here and there, to illustrate how public that history has been. From the second century to our own day, the record of the gospel is part of the secular history of the world. Its teaching has been public ; its influence has been manifest ; the causes of its endurance and its progress may be investigated, they are not hard to apprehend. I say, it is absurd to treat a religion with a history like this as if it was only a philosophic system, to be tried by metaphysical maxims, and dismissed with a contemptuous reference to the exploded ideas of superstition. It runs up into the narrative of a human life. As we trace the Roman empire to Caius Julius Cæsar, we trace the origin of the church to Christ. He is as much an historical personage as Alexander. It is easy to understand what is said of Him ; it is quite possible to understand what reasons these Christians of the second and third centuries had for believing what they said of Him. We have documents, records professing to be authentic copies of

original records concerning Him and his first followers. To the Christian, who finds in his own heart's response to the gospel, and in the experience of the Christian life, the simplest, surest warrant for believing in Him, it must be of surpassing interest to investigate their claims. The unbeliever can only refuse to do so in contempt of the full significance of what is certainly the most important factor of European history; no honest and intelligent person can ignore these records.

11. I now ask you to notice a few reasons for believing that our New Testament is a faithful copy of the original records of the Christian religion; and that it contains a true history of the life and death of Christ and the formation of the early church.

There is no classical book—history, philosophy or poetry—ancient manuscripts of which exist in anything like the number of existing manuscripts of the New Testament. The classical manuscripts are counted by the unit, those of the New Testament by the score: and the result is a corresponding increase of confidence in the authenticity of the text of the New Testament. Errors exist in all manuscript copies of ancient writings. In the classical manuscripts many errors may pass undetected; and when an error is perceived it can only be conjecturally corrected. In the case of the New Testament, however, the manuscripts are so many and from so various sources that error in some of them is almost sure to be revealed by a difference of reading in the rest: and the correction of errors is made, not by conjecture solely, but by a comparison of the various readings with one another. The text of the great classical authors is nevertheless received

and rightly received, with little hesitation as to its veracity ; the confidence with which the text of the New Testament may be received is larger in proportion as we have better means for detecting and correcting errors.

No manuscript of the Greek Testament is of older date than the 4th century. To this century belong two manuscripts ; one probably to the first, the other to the second, half of the century. These documents themselves are manifestly not originals, but copies of older manuscripts ; there are, moreover, peculiarities in them, which look like variations, already venerable and traditionary, from original documents much older than themselves. Of the later MSS. none are copies of either of these two. The most important of them are carefully executed copies of older manuscripts which represent other lines of copyist tradition than that represented in the two already referred to. We have not only differing copies, but differing schools, so to speak, of copies ; a fact that testifies to a long period separating between the originals and even the oldest copies extant.

We are carried farther back than any extant Greek MS. can take us by the existence of two translations, the old Latin and the old Syriac. No copies of these translations exist so old as the two fourth century Greek MSS. just referred to ; but the translations themselves are of a much earlier date. It is possible to detect the proximate date of translations by peculiarities marking the dialect of a particular time. Each period, for instance, in the history of the English language has been distinguished by the use of words, phrases and grammatical forms peculiar to itself. On such grounds scholars refer these two translations to the

middle of the 2nd century ; one of them belongs certainly to the first half of the century.

Quotations, too, are found in the early Christian Fathers which, there can be little doubt, are quotations from memory of passages found in our New Testament, and existing in a New Testament then known in the churches. Such quotations were used in controversy by the Greek Apologists of the early part of the 2nd century; and by all subsequent Fathers, in whose writings they are confessedly quotations from our New Testament.

Putting all these things together, the result is, that in the revised New Testament, issued in 1881, you have a very faithful and accurate translation of documents, to the originals of which no later date can be assigned than the end of the first or the beginning of the second century.

How are we to fill up the gap between this period and the death of Christ? We know that churches existed during this period: the evidence of this is not confined to the New Testament, it is found in contemporary Roman history. The churches existed before the written New Testament. Most of the epistles were written before any of the four gospels; and they were written for the use of churches. The churches were founded by the preaching of the apostles and apostolic men; and were disciplined in the facts and doctrines of the gospel by teachers like Timothy, who first of all accompanied the apostles, waited on them, heard their instructions, and were trained to continue and complete the work of which the preaching of the Apostles was the beginning. The oral gospel came

before the written gospel; not all at once did the need of a written history appear; the period of Apostolic teaching preceded the literature of the church.

The Apostles Paul and Peter died about the year 67; and the Apostle John not until some time after. Not more than a generation and a half or two generations elapsed between the apostles and the date at which it can be said with reasonable certainty that the New Testament was first translated. A book is generally in existence some time before a translation is demanded; the early Christians were not a literary community; not at once would the need of a translation be felt by them. We have other indications of the existence of the New Testament during this period in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Their writings contain a few references to sayings of Christ and His Apostles which answer to passages in our New Testament. They are not literal quotations; literal quotations were not the habit of the time; nor can it be absolutely affirmed that they were copied from the writings to which we refer them. But this may be asserted: either those passages are free quotations from Christian writings, and if so, then from the originals of the books of our New Testament; or they were familiar passages in the Christian tradition of the time, and the correspondence between them and the New Testament passages is sufficient to establish the substantial identity of the tradition, *i.e.*, the oral gospel, and the written records of Christianity.

There remains to be considered the question—what reason have we for believing that these records are a faithful report of historic incidents? may there not have been a

myth-making period in the church, when men clothed in marvellous stories concerning Christ, the pure and beneficent tradition on which the churches were founded? when legends of superhuman personality and miraculous energy might gather around one whom the early Christians regarded as the founder of their faith, to whose influence they owed so much of spiritual quickening and moral elevation?

a. First, consider what I have already alluded to, that the gospel history begins in the midst of civilisation. Many persons come to the study of the gospels with a prejudice resulting from a floating fancy—I cannot call it an idea, for a moment's reflection will dispel it—that the New Testament, like the old, had its origin in a dim remote period, which history cannot criticise; that we have a legendary stage in the gospel narrative, gradually passing into clear historic light: and a still greater number of persons suppose that the classical times were like the middle ages of Europe, times when ignorance prevailed, and superstitions were rife, and there was no literary activity. These conceptions are wholly erroneous. Christ lived immediately after the Augustan age, the culminating period of Rome's glory. The civilisation of Rome was, with two exceptions, its lack of moral elevation and breadth, and its lack of modern scientific knowledge, fully equal to that of modern nations. The Roman gentleman would have been at home in Paris and London. He would soon have acquired the knowledge of facts necessary to set him in the current of modern conversation. He discussed our questions; he was interested in our problems. He used the same language which many among us use, concerning life, its value, its tedium and unsatisfactoriness. Recent philosophical ideas were not

strange to him ; he would have recognised in the conceptions of modern materialism old thought in a new dress. It was an age of searching scepticism and restless curiosity ; of intense literary activity and widespread information. Officers in camp and politicians in the provinces were supplied with their daily newspaper. Martial tells us that a well bound copy of his works could be purchased for a little more than a shilling ; and that for one of his volumes selling for sixpence, threepence would have been a remunerative price. Horace, Ovid and other poets anticipate an immediate and widespread popularity ; their works travelled into the provinces, and were read across the sea. Postal communication between the different parts of the Empire was equal to that which prevailed in modern Europe just previous to the introduction of railways. The Romans are still regarded as the model road-makers of the world ; and the object of their roads was to put the distant parts of the Empire into constant and immediate communication with the city. There prevailed, too, an exceeding jealousy of dangerous superstitions. The distinction was drawn between religions that could, and religions that could not, be tolerated ; every religion had to undergo official examination. Palestine was not a distant land, lying in some secluded backwater of the Empire's life. It was in the highway of Oriental conquest ; it was continually the object of anxiety and suspicion in the councils of the Empire. The question whether the Jewish faith was to be regarded as licit or illicit came up for consideration more than once during the Apostolic period ; long before the 1st century ended the attention of the emperors was called to the Christians by trials, outbreaks and persecutions in various provinces.

The celebrated letter of Pliny to Trajan belongs to the very beginning of the 2nd century. In it, he reports on the difficulty he finds in knowing how to deal with Christians brought to trial before him, as proconsul of Bithynia and Pontus. The number of the accused is great. "Many of every age and rank, and of both sexes, are involved in the danger; for the contagion of this superstition has seized not only cities, but also the villages and open country." Pliny carefully examined apostates from the Christian faith, as well as its professors, putting two Christian slave girls to the torture, and the sum of the information he obtained was this; "that the Christians were accustomed to meet before day-break on the first day of the week; that they sang hymns to Christ as to a god; that they pledged themselves to one another not to commit crimes, such as theft and adultery, never to break their word, and to be faithful to trusts committed to them; that they then separated, and came together in the evening to a simple meal."

b. The New Testament narratives, moreover, look like veritable history. There is a coherence like that of fact in the record internally considered: even the miracles arise naturally out of the conditions described; they are neither added for the sake of sustaining the claims of Christ, nor is attention drawn to them by notes of admiration in the style of the writers. When the story, both in the gospels and the Acts, touches on external history, it is found to be true in local colour to the facts with which it deals. Changes were continually taking place, in the Apostolic period, in the boundaries of provinces, the persons of governors, and their political relations; and these are accurately referred to, when the New Testament narrative touches on the places and

times affected by them. The characters of Roman governors are in accord with what is known of them from other sources; Pilate and Gallio, for instance, appear in the New Testament in perfect consistency with the descriptions given of them in Roman literature. Not only is the general condition of heathen society truthfully delineated; the differences between the populations of different cities, such as Ephesus and Corinth, form an essential part of the story.

Now consider what all this involves. A literary forgery is almost an impossibility, so great an accuracy, so subtle a literary skill is demanded for it: even the blending of fictitious details with a narrative of facts cannot escape detection if the writer is dealing with a place and time other than his own. The men who wrote these books were unlettered; the story is told of an English University tutor who dissuaded his pupils from reading the New Testament in the original, lest they should spoil their Greek. They were provincial in habit, of narrow experience and still narrower culture; their inability to catch the spirit, and imagine the life of foreign men and cities, was increased by the antipathy to heathen manners produced in them by intense religious conviction and the hostility with which their religion caused them to be regarded.

c. Nor were the New Testament writers the men to have tolerated the confounding of fact and fiction; a myth would have been to them a lie. Their earnest purpose and good faith are beyond challenge. They displayed a moral force in the presence of persecution, obloquy and scorn, and wielded an influence on society, wholly inconsistent with insincerity. Now observe the way in which they speak of their own

purpose in their writing. "*We followed not cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye witnesses of his majesty.*"* "*That which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life, declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us.*"† The Apostle Paul in I Cor. xv., declares that the whole fabric of Christianity falls if Christ did not rise from the dead in such a sense as that he might be seen and recognised: and John proclaims an ethical creed which makes the myth-making hypothesis an impossibility. "*I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because no lie is of the truth.*" ‡

d. We have, moreover, the means of tracing the direction which corruption of the original manuscripts did actually take and the extent to which it proceeded. The number of "various readings" in the different manuscripts, original and translations, has imposed an enormous and a tedious labour on critics of the text; but with this signal advantage, that we see exactly what were the influences affecting the integrity of documents in the early church. The interpolations of prof texts was one form of corruption. Of this sort are the confession of the Eunuch (interpolated Acts viii. 37.) and the "three heavenly witnesses" (I John v. 7) A gloss is introduced, borrowed from Jewish tradition, in the story of the pool of Bethesda, (John v. 3, 4); a story concerning our Lord has crept into a gospel to which it does not belong, in John viii. 1-11; and in Mark xvi. 9-20.; and passages from the Old Testament are quoted as fulfilled in the new, as for

* II Peter i. 16. † I John i. 1, 3. ‡ I John ii. 21.

instance in Mark xv. 28. But how little the substance of the New Testament is affected by these influences any one can estimate who will read the revised New Testament together with the authorised version ; of a myth-making process that should have changed the whole conception of the person of Christ, there is not a trace.

The historical sketch I have given you is both brief and fragmentary ; but it is enough to establish what I am contending for, that the gospel record deserves to be studied as a history. To us believers it has a deep interest ; we see God in the history. The truths of our faith commend themselves by their own divine light ; and the providence which has guided human affairs awakens our reverent and grateful admiration. The sense of the veracity of the early witnesses, of the historic credibility of the narrative, comes in as a defence of our faith ; and a ground on which to claim for it the attention of unbelievers. These things “are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye may have life in his name.”





LECTURE III.

THE GOSPEL RECORD—ITS CONTENTS.

In our last Lecture, I reminded you of the continuity of Christian history from the present to the first century ; and briefly detailed reasons for believing that the New Testament is a faithful copy of the original records of the Christian faith. I am now going to dwell on the significance of these facts ; in the substance of the Apostles' teaching, and the story of the life and death of Jesus Christ, we have what will explain the progress of Christianity, and account for its marvellous results.

1. Distinguish between these two notions ; the notion that the Christian ideas have rooted themselves in the religious consciousness of humanity ; and the notion that Christianity is a natural outcome, a development, of the religious consciousness of humanity. The adaptation of the gospel to the instincts and needs of the human soul has always been a favourite and powerful argument with defenders of the Christian faith. It is evidenced by the complete displacement of European paganism, and the precious fruits of Christianity in the advancement and benignity of European civilisation : we see the gospel, in our own day, by the response which it awakens in the deepest heart of

man, overcoming various forms of heathenism in the mission field ; at this very time, not only has Hindoo superstition fallen, the Christian teachings concerning God and the great ethical ideas of the gospel are forming the new life of our Indian empire. Even the unbelief of England is deeply pervaded by Christian thought ; it borrows its philanthropic purpose and spiritual aspiration from the gospel. But to say this is totally different from saying that the heart of man gave these influences birth : the origin of the religious ideas with which is the future of the world *can* be traced to a prevalent Christianity ; from the facts which the gospel declares these ideas sprang.

Let me illustrate this distinction by a familiar fact. The larch is now-a-days a characteristic English tree. We find it everywhere. It grows in the back rows of our shrubberies ; it rises in our hedges ; in woods it stunts and dwarfs and kills out saplings of oak and elm and alder. It stands in copses a cover for foxes or for game ; it clothes our hillsides ; it is thoroughly at home on British soil. And yet, if you refer to any book of the "British Flora," you will not find the larch mentioned. The reason is, because the larch is not of native growth. We know the history of its introduction. In 1727, four slips were given to the Duke of Athole ; two of them were planted in his grounds at Dunkeld, two were given by him to a friend, and from that time it has spread until it has become one of the commonest features of our landscape. The larch is rooted ineradicably on British ground, but it is not a product of British ground ; the soil of Britain is adapted to it, but the soil of Britain did not develope it. So, too, the gospel is adapted to the soul of man, it has found its home in human consciousness : but

it has been brought to man ; it is no outcome of his nature, although it has so firmly rooted itself in his nature. Remember this distinction, I pray you ; it will save you from many a fallacious interpretation of the facts of man's religious history.

The gospel is an introduction into human history ; not an outgrowth of human history. It is not a philosophical system ; it is a message, it professes to be a message from God to man. The meaning of the Greek word for gospel is benign message, tidings of good. Its foremost preacher loved to call himself an ambassador. Writing to the Gentiles, he says "*Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*"* Speaking to Jews, he uses the same style of language, and presents himself to them as a messenger. "*We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same in us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again.*"† Observe the significance of these words. He does not say—the system of Mosaism, confessedly incomplete, is now perfected ; the truth you have been waiting for has been discovered : he says—the promise made by God unto our fathers He has fulfilled ; we declare this unto you, and affirm it on the ground that God hath raised Jesus up from the dead. And this language, you know, is not a mere casual metaphor or hyperbole ; it is of the essence of the Apostolic position, as the Apostles conceived it. The very name Apostle means, one sent. They were sent by Christ ; and Christ was sent of God.

* II Cor. v. 20.

† Acts xiii. 32, 33.

Christ speaks of himself as consecrated, set apart by God for an earthly mission, come into the world to fulfil a definite divine purpose. We are familiar with the words used by Christ, "The Son of man is come into the world;" and with the words used about Him, "God sent his Son into the world." Our familiarity with them obscures their marked singularity, their profound significance. We should think it strange if one among ourselves talked thus; "I am come into the world for such an end." On Christ's lips such language is not strange; it is so wholly in accordance with our sense of His mystic personality; it throws so much light on the immense promises made in His name, the large achievements of His life and death.

One of the most familiar phrases in the Acts of the Apostles is "preaching the word." The term itself, "the word," is a significant one; it was employed by the old Jewish prophets when they intended to assert, in the most emphatic manner, that a divine message was given them to announce; and the attitude of a "preacher of the word" was as significant as the phrase. It was the boast, of the Pagan empire and the Jewish people alike, that the proselytising spirit was unknown to them. The gods of the heathen were not conceived of as making themselves known to the nations, and calling them to faith. Temples stood, in cities and in picturesque localities, to which those resorted who had special favours to entreat of particular deities. The legends of gods appearing to men were either of appearances of a particular deity to some favoured worshipper or beloved mortal; or visits of Jupiter to find out how men behaved. The evangelistic fervour was an unknown thing to the heathen; their religion knew no such

enthusiasm as could prompt it : toleration of all national forms of faith was the Roman virtue, not the zeal that aimed at making converts.

Nor was the Jewish spirit very different. There were indeed a large number of proselytes in many heathen cities where Jewish synagogues were found ; but these proselytes were persons of serious habit and thoughtful mind, "devout persons" as they were called in the New Testament, who were led to enquire into the Jewish faith by their own eager desire to learn what they could for the satisfaction of a restlessness, a yearning of spirit, which neither philosophy nor idolatry could content. The Jewish expectation of Messiah was of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel and the judgment of the world. In contrast to this expectation is the declaration in John iii. 17. "*God sent not his Son into the world to judge the world ; but that the world through him might be saved.*" Here, again, we meet the special claim of the gospel to be a special divine introduction. It is directly asserted, "God sent : " it is involved in the mode in which the salvation is given, "by faith." The world was to be saved by a Saviour ; faith was the acceptance of Him.

We see, in the condition of both the heathenism and Judaism of the first Christian century, a soil prepared for the gospel, in which the Christian ideas might take root and grow. Like the fallen leaves of forests, which make a deep and fertile *humus* in which new plantings may root themselves, the experience of past generations,—experience of mistakes, and disappointment of spirit, and weariness, and restlessness, and moral dissatisfaction fast becoming despair,—had provided a spiritual consciousness which

responded at once when Christ was preached, a messenger and message from heaven. But the power of the preachers was not in the prevalent despair and restlessness ; it was in the benign message which had been given them, and their consciousness that it had been given them by Christ : the moral degradation of mankind was not the source of their enthusiasm ; this moved their compassion ; their enthusiasm resulted from their assurance that they were sent to call men from their degradation to a new and nobler life. We have here two books illustrating each other. Secular history records that, at a time of moral darkness and wretchedness such as civilisation had never known before, the world made a new, an upward start ; that, in the second century of the Christian era, Christianity was advancing with a rapidity which alarmed the Empire, called for special executive acts and lit the fires of persecution ; and that notwithstanding all, the new sect could be neither confuted nor quelled, but continued ever growing. This is the outward historical fact. The secret history—to borrow a term used when the private documents of a court or society are published—the secret history shews the preachers of the new faith to have been animated by a deep conviction that they had received from God a message of salvation to the wretched society in which they moved ; that, in the resurrection of Christ, they had a fact to proclaim which warranted their confidence, and would commend itself to those who should patiently and sympathetically listen to what they had to say. Can we doubt what is the connection between the secular and the Christian history ? can we doubt that in the one we have the historic phenomenon, and in the other its explanation ? Assuredly the early Christians were animated by these

convictions. Undoubtedly the change which has passed over the world dates from them. And there is that in their faith which accounts for both their enthusiasm and their success. What is there which may account for their faith?

II. The first reason for the faith of the Apostles was, undoubtedly, the impression which Jesus Christ himself made upon them. The original preachers of the gospel were friends and pupils of Jesus. They were admitted to His inner friendship; He chose them "that they might be with him," that He might teach them, and in due time send them out to declare the truth which they had learned. We can trace the progress of their apprehension of His character and person. The first impression is that of Andrew, "*we have found the Messiah*;" and of Philip, "*we have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*"* This continued to be the confession of the Apostles; but it grew in intensity and significance. They saw and felt in Him a personal influence to which they could but yield. When Jesus saw the multitudes, who had been easily drawn to Him, as easily deserting Him, He turned to the twelve and said, "*Will ye also go away?*" Peter's answer reveals a fulness of feeling, and a confidence, in their confession of His Messiahship which it had not at first. "*Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*"† The sense of His personal influence increased with their acquaintance with the truths He taught them; nay their personal faith in Him was always in advance of their

* John i. 41, 45.

† John vi. 67-69.

knowledge of the lessons which He gave them. Not until some time after His death did they rid themselves of their old notion, that the Christ should be a great temporal conqueror ; but their trust in Jesus was absolute, unflinching. And this is in full accord with what we have already seen to be their testimony concerning Him. If the substance of their testimony was that they were messengers, we should only expect them to evince a large confidence in Him who sent them forth. Their doctrine was " Salvation by faith in a Saviour : " no man could effectually proclaim such a doctrine whose own faith was not manifest and absolute.

The confession of the Apostles after Christ's resurrection was that to which this development of personal trust was leading up. It is found in the words of Thomas, when he bowed in adoration, saying " My Lord and my God." This became the faith of those who numbered themselves among His disciples. We read it in the Acts of the Apostles. "*They stoned Stephen making invocation, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*"* We read it too in Pliny's letter to Trajan, quoted in my last Lecture : " They tell us nothing but this, they meet in the morning before day to sing hymns to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves to commit no crime."

This personal confidence in Christ, originally springing from the impression made by Christ on His disciples, was confirmed by their experience as preachers of His name. He had given them promises, and He kept them. If persons are startled at a statement so strange as that the Apostles wrought miracles ; they have to remember, first,

* Acts vii. 59.

that their confidence as preachers needed the sense of association with the world above to sustain it: secondly, that the record of the labours of the Apostles is in full harmony with the record of the commission originally given them by Christ, "*He called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness;*"* and with his latest promise to them, "*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*"† Their faith was confirmed not only by the "signs" which followed their fidelity: they held intercourse with their Master after His resurrection. They called upon His name; they knew themselves to be in fellowship with Him; the converts whom they made came to use the same language as themselves, with the same feeling of its veracity. It is a matter of history, which every period of the church confirms, that it is the Christian habit to speak of Christ as a personal friend and living Saviour. Down to this time, men talk of holding communion with Him. The Apostles felt themselves also sustained by aids from above. Few chapters even of Christian history are fuller of waxing enthusiasm and courage than the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The men grow bolder, more confident as we listen to them. Before the Sanhedrin they talk as conscious of a lofty commission, and charged with fidelity to God. "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" "*Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*"‡ They lift up their voices to God

* Matt. x. 1. † Matt. xxviii. 20. ‡ Acts v. 29, iv. 19, 20.

and speak in the unhesitating language of men conscious of fellowship with heaven. They speak and are answered.* There are some words in the Acts of the Apostles (iv. 13), which set before us the wonder they excited, and reveal the secret of their power. "*When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled ; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*" The reason of their continued confidence and their success is given us in another passage ; which speaks of the gospel as a "*great salvation, which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard ; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.*"†

Such is the representation given us of the first preachers of the gospel. They acted as men conscious of inspiration. They produced on others the impression of being inspired men. But they were not only confessors of a new spiritual consciousness, of which the author was Jesus Christ ; they were also witnesses to a fact, they proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There is no need to prove that they proclaimed this ; the whole book of the Acts is evidence of it ; His resurrection was the burden of all the earliest discourses in Jerusalem, it was the basis of Paul's appeals to both the Jews and the heathen, to whom he preached. The Apostle Peter describes the functions of an Apostle in his discourse to Cornelius. "*The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace,*

* See Acts iv. 23-31.

† Heb. ii. 3, 4.

*by Jesus Christ : (he is Lord of all) : that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power : who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem ; whom they slew and hanged on a tree : Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly ; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.** The Apostles were witnesses, chosen before ; they knew Him well before He was crucified, and were able to recognise Him after He was risen. Look, too, to the sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii.), delivered fifty days after the crucifixion, in the city where He was crucified, to men who had seen Him die ; and you will understand the place of the resurrection in early Apostolic preaching. The Apostles declared the resurrection where disproof of it would have been at once forthcoming ; before men who, if not overcome by the evidence of it, would have been infuriated by the charge underlying it, that all who had taken part in the crucifixion were murderers and impious men, slayers of the Holy and Righteous one. They were not infuriated ; they were “ pricked to the heart,” and cried out, “ Men and brethren, what must we do ? ” And when Peter preached repentance and faith, they were bowed down with contrition

* Acts x. 36-42.

and yielded themselves to God. Such is the account given us of the first preaching of the Apostles after the resurrection; it is a consistent narrative of events which may very well have formed the beginning of that wonderful display of new moral and spiritual force which unquestionably the history of Christianity reveals.

III. We need not farther pursue the consideration of the contents of the gospel record. It does contain more than I have referred to, more of the supernatural; but they who accept the reality of Christ's resurrection will not be troubled when they note how the miracles of Christ enter into the very substance of His history; they will recognise how the circumstances under which they are wrought call as naturally for them as the needs of His teaching call for His parables; will feel how easy it is to believe that one who stood among men, in their sicknesses and miseries and varied woes, with power to heal, would let His power and grace flow forth and heal them. There are doctrines preached as part of the gospel,—atonement, redemption, reconciliation, restoration: these should be no obstacle to faith; for a fact, so portentous and so august as the resurrection of Jesus, must needs have some stupendous significance in relation to the whole of our moral and spiritual being, and our standing with regard to God.

The significance of the resurrection is the emphatic testimony it bears to a world beyond the seen and temporal: it testifies to another order of being than that whose phenomena can be tested in the laboratory; or whose responsibilities are those merely of our courts of law and our social arrangements. The argument from the Christian miracles

has often been misrepresented to be this—‘you must believe these statements because some wonderful deed has been wrought ; acknowledge a message to be true because here is a display of power.’ No wonder men repudiate such an argument. Power and truth have no necessary relation to each other. You might as well think of buying affection, or weighing moral sentiments in scales, as of supporting truth by displays of power.

The incidence of the resurrection is this. Christ comes to us professedly a messenger from the world beyond : are His powers limited to the forces of ordinary natural life ? His words, His teachings, His whole life are in themselves deeply impressive : He has the stamp of truth upon Him. None can refuse to recognise the elevation, the charm, the grandeur of His utterances. But we are often startled by the manifestation of a consciousness in Him which transcends that of mortals. He asserts claims which can in no way be reconciled with the conditions of our human existence. It is true that such a consciousness, such claims are in harmony with all He says, and all He appears to be. But they need some attestation. Truth must be its own witness : but when one professes to be in connection with the Divine intelligence and power, when one professes to have come direct from God ; we ask, is this delusion or is it fact ? Miracles can help us here. In the unity of Christ’s life, the teaching and the power, both transcending the conditions of human life, are in complete accord. He proclaims Himself the Son of God ; and He is declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead.

Here, too, is the answer to the Agnosticism which says, “nothing can be known of God.” We cannot, indeed,

pass beyond sensible phenomena by the exercise of our senses, and by reasonings from the experience with which they furnish us; nor find a way from sensible experiences to affirmations far out of their range: but we can listen when One from God speaks to us; we can prove His trustworthiness, and by our experience of this warrant our faith in Him.

Miracles are sometimes said to be the great difficulty in the way of Christian faith. I do not think many *will* say so now. We want an assurance which nature cannot supply; hopes, aspirations, confidences drawn from another source. The modern non-christian world is sinking into despair. One of the brightest of its spirits was wont to beg that religion might never be named to him, so bitter was his disappointment with the religion out of which Christ had gone. Moralists are distracted to perceive that morals stand in need of some transcendent sanction, which out of Christianity they cannot find. Science says boldly, she knows nothing of the goodness, the trustworthiness which deists see in nature: in the doctrine of evolution, there is no warrant for the belief in a perpetually upward movement. And now there has come—God grant that it be the final portent of the age—the pessimist doctrine that intelligent life is unutterably sad, and consciousness one of nature's blunders.

“O life as futile, then, as frail !

O for thy voice to soothe and bless !

What hope of answer, or redress ?

Behind the veil, behind the veil.”

One word more. I have said that the first reason of the Apostles' faith was the personal impression made on them by

Christ ; this is still our warrant for believing. To say this may seem at once to put questions concerning Christian faith beyond the pale of ordinary argument ; to demand that a man should believe before he finds the arguments for faith sufficient. Yes ! my friends, but there is a difference between arguments for faith and a warrant for faith. The persuasive force of Christ's character, His influence in working conviction, is a fact in the experience of those who know it as real as any fact, as capable too of being estimated on rational grounds. And, note also this. The place occupied by the Christian consciousness in the Christian testimony is in harmony with all which I have asserted about the supernatural origin of the gospel, and its claims to be a message from God. In no way can we construct arguments for the Christian faith equally intelligible and forcible to those who are believers in Christ and to those who are not. To suppose this possible would be at once to reduce the supernatural to the plane of nature ; *i.e.*, to disprove the very claim of the gospel. It would be a denial that the gift of God is eternal life, and that the life is the light of men.





LECTURE IV.

THE CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS.

The subject of this evening's Lecture is the Christian consciousness as part of the Christian testimony. We have traced the benign civilisation of Christendom to its origin in the gospel. We have seen that the founders of Christendom were Apostles of Christ, that they looked on themselves as God's messengers ; the peculiarity of their position was their claim to be the publishers and expounders of a direct revelation of God ; ministers of Christ, who had been sent into the world to reveal and accomplish the purpose of the heavenly Father towards mankind. I am going, this evening, to ask you to notice the testimony which the Christian consciousness furnishes to the connection between the religious belief and the ethical force of Christendom ; and to the relation which, in the gospel, God is represented as sustaining to man. We have an exceedingly full Christian literature ; we know what Christians say of themselves and for themselves. We have defences uttered before those who put them on their trial ; discourses in which they encourage one another to fidelity, and in which the wise and experienced instruct the less experienced in the import of their faith ; we have biographies revealing the inmost life of Christians ; hymns breathing their impulses and aspirations ; epitaphs above their dead.

We have their studied and their unstudied utterances ; the Christian life, as Christians themselves understand it, is before us : and no man can be said to know the Christian evidences who has not made himself acquainted with this. The full import of the gospel cannot be known from without ; the words and deeds of Christians are the manifestation of the real operation of the gospel.

It is no unreasonable demand, that those who would fairly estimate the claims of the gospel should acquaint themselves with the forces of the Christian life as Christians apprehend them. In every department of life,—in science, manufactures, commerce, social problems—the testimony is received of experts, *i.e.*, men who have practical knowledge of the subject of which they speak ; and no judgment is held to be fair and trustworthy, in which due weight has not been given to the testimony which the experts offer. A large amount of indifference to the gospel proceeds from ignorance of the Christian consciousness. Christianity is emphatically a life, with inner sources as well as an external history ; and the history cannot be understood without a knowledge of its relations to the internal Christian life. Nor can the doctrines of the gospel possibly be appreciated while men contemptuously ignore the mode in which Christians themselves conceive them.

A remarkable illustration of misapprehension, arising from this source, was given us a few years ago. A proposal was made of a practical test of the efficacy of prayer in the relief of sickness : it is understood to have proceeded from Sir Henry Thompson, and it was commended to the public by a few prefatory words from Professor Tyndall ; each of

those men being of the highest reputation in his own department of science. The proposal was, to assign one ward in a hospital to patients who should be prayed for, and another to patients who should not ; and the results of cure in the one case and in the other should be reported. The suggestion was apparently made in good faith by its proposers ; who could hardly have anticipated how monstrous it would appear to all Christians. These were shocked, first, by the cynicism of the proposal ; as if *men* who had gained a sense of the value of human life from Jesus of Nazareth, and who drew from Him a perennial sympathy with suffering, would ever consent to doom any number of afflicted persons to exclusion from an interest in their prayers. The experiment would have been vitiated from the first by this fact ; the publication of its terms would immediately have enlisted on behalf of those not to be prayed for the special compassion and the earnest supplications of thousands resenting so cruel an experiment. Christians were shocked, secondly, by the impiety of the proposal. Prayer is the utterance of faith, and this was a suggestion of unbelief. Faith dictates no terms to God ; it waits on Him submissive to His will. Faith is no process of curious experimenting ; it is a habit of dependence on God, the casting all our care on Him who careth for us. The proposal, lastly, exhibits complete ignorance of what prayer is in the purpose and experience of praying men. It is not for us to determine beforehand what we will, and what we will not, persist in asking. In a very lofty sense, the words of Paul are true, " we know not what we shall pray for ; the Spirit maketh intercession for us." In the act of praying we are taught what to ask for and how to ask. Desires we

intended to utter die into silence, and things we did not design to beseech become objects of our supplication. The judgment becomes cleared, impulses are awakened in us, things are revealed to us which we grasp rather than wait for; prayer is frank, spontaneous; it is communion with God, He talks with us while we talk with Him: it is contrary to all our experience in praying that we should come, self-bound, and seeking to bind God, by our predeterminations.

I can anticipate an objection that may be taken to the treatment of the Christian consciousness as the evidence of experts. It may be said, 'the experience of Christians is contradicted by the experience of unbelievers. All down the course of Christian history there have been unbelievers, men whose consciousness is in opposition to that of Christians; the one experience neutralises the other.' Let me point out a fallacy here. One experiment, one experience, cannot contradict another, unless the forces investigated, and the conditions of the investigation, are the same. The unbeliever has not a consciousness contradictory to that of the man of faith; he has no experience of faith at all: that the result of his non-faith should be widely different from the results of the faith of the Christian, is not only consistent with, it is confirmatory of, the Christian consciousness. You cannot proclaim the faith of the gospel to be a delusion on the ground that those who disbelieve the gospel have no consciousness answering to that of believers in it.

Christianity has an external history; marked and mighty results have attended and still attend its spread; Christianity is also a doctrinal system; it has its own distinctive beliefs: the life which the history records is

intelligible, is explicable, when viewed in connection with those beliefs. The Christian consciousness supplies the link between the history and the faith ; it is the testimony of men who, having the faith, do, as its result, know themselves to be animated by the motives, impelled to the conduct, and inspired with the triumphant energies which the history records.

1. I shall first illustrate the testimony of the Christian consciousness to the practical power of Christian beliefs: and out of many aspects in which Christian contrasts with non-christian civilisation, I have chosen for illustration three; the home life; the abolition of slavery; and the cosmopolitan spirit, in other words, the recognition of the common brotherhood of mankind. In these three instances, we have one in which the Christian idea has long been prevalent ; the home life of Christian civilisation is a tradition almost as old as Christianity itself: we have another which has been fully accomplished in our own times: and a third in which the Christian idea has its complete triumph yet to win.

a. Of home life, as we understand it, the heathenism of the time of Christ knew nothing. Greek civilisation neither contemplated domestic purity nor cultivated the tender ties that bind father and mother to each and all their children. In the Grecian cities the family was rigidly subordinated to the state ; even a man's children were regarded rather as future citizens, with whom he was entrusted for the common welfare, than as his own in any very tender signification. Of frank intercourse between husband and wife, their sharing one another's thoughts, being admitted to one another's

confidence, there was very little. In a conversation with Socrates a man is reported to have said, "I talk to no one less than to my wife." In the beautiful story of the death of Socrates, his wife Xanthippe is introduced as coming to bid him farewell. We know how touching such a scene would be in a modern author; how the wife's contrition for all her petulance would prompt words of soothing and forgiveness from her dying husband. We know how many a pathetic and heroic interview took place between Christian martyrs and their wives; there have been often described for us the struggle of tenderness and lofty virtue, the parting full of mingled sorrow and encouragement, the words of farewell giving place to words which speak of re-union. In the story of the death of Socrates, the introduction of his wife lends a character of grotesqueness, almost of farce, to the narrative. Her noisy grief is treated as an intrusion on the intercourse between the philosopher and his friends; and as soon as they come in, Socrates bids one of them; "let somebody take her home;" so some of Crito's people took her away, crying out and beating her breast. There were educated women in Grecian society, but they were not the wives of the men who associated with them. The scandals attaching to these friendships, when a man had to go out of his own home for intelligent female society, were such as to lead the Apostle Paul, writing to the church in a Grecian city, to repress the action and speech of woman in the Christian assembly.

In Rome, in the early days of the Republic, we have indications of lofty conceptions of the conjugal relation and the sanctity of home life; but even before the Empire these had disappeared. The facility of divorce, and the shamelessness with which a woman would become the wife of one

living man after another, reveal a domestic life corrupted at its sources. The power of a father over his children, like that of a master over his slaves, shews the want of any recognition of tenderness as entering essentially into the family relation. The custom of adoption reveals the same lack. When a man, by a legal process, can make a stranger in all respects as a son, it indicates that the natural relation between father and son cannot have been very close and real.

In the midst of a society thus wanting in our modern conceptions of what home life may be, there began to exist Christian homes ; and these had, from the first, a character of their own. In such households we should have found what we are accustomed to ; friendship and affection between parents and their children, authority tempered with loving interest ; relations such as now, thank God, are the tradition and heritage of us all.

How did this change in the idea of the family come about ? There were one or two incidental circumstances helping it. The exclusion of Christians from many a form of public life ; their self-imposed absence, and the absence prescribed by parents to their children, from scenes of public amusement, had much to do with it. Christians could not resort to the brutal sports of the amphitheatre, and the obscene representations of the drama ; for their recreation they were forced into the domestic circle. But beneath these reasons there was the habit which Christian parents had of regarding their children as Christ's redeemed ones and children of God ; the mothers, equally with the fathers—in the earliest years, the mothers even more than the fathers—felt themselves charged with the work of training them up

for the kingdom of heaven. Many beautiful pictures are given by church historians of the domestic life of the early Christians, constructed out of incidental references in the writings of the Fathers. One, by Mr. Bass Mullinger, is short enough to allow me to quote it here. "In the family circle, at the third hour, the scriptures were read, the common prayer was offered, and the Hallelujah Psalm sung. Then followed the first meal of the day, preceded, like every other meal, by a special prayer for the divine blessing, an observance which, to use the expression of Clement of Alexandria, converted every meal into a sacrament. When the first meal was over, the mother and her children exchanged the kiss of peace and then separated, where necessary, for their daily tasks . . . Husband and wife were enjoined both to pray together and to study the Scriptures together . . . Even in the exercise of hospitality prayer found a place, and the householder was enjoined not to let his guest depart without a joint observance of this rite."* The Christian belief is seen both here, and in very many a quotation which might be given from various early Christian writings, to be at the root of the Christian observances: the belief, viz., in a common redemption, and the value imparted thereby to each individual soul; the belief that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, but all are one in Him.

b. The abolition or, to speak more strictly, the gradual desuetude of slavery in the Roman empire under Christian influences is another illustration of the way in which the Christian consciousness explains the historic facts of Christendom. The Christian habit, formed and dominated

* Smith's Dict. Christian Antiq. Vol. II. p. 1911.

by the Christian belief, practically altered the whole relation between the master and his slaves : it changed their mode of regarding one another ; and out of this change came at length the recognition of the right of the slave to freedom. The early Christians were not political agitators, nor social reformers ; one of the things they most feared was to be regarded as such. Hence the various admonitions in the New Testament that men should be content with their position ; should not be restless under the pressure of outward circumstances, but remember that the spirit of a man determined his real and vital relations ; the appeal suggested to them from the constitution of human society to the bar of Christ, and the hope of another world in which wrongs endured at the hand of society should be set right. But within the Church, from the beginning, there was no recognition of slavery ; the distinction between master and slave ceased here. One of the conspicuous features of Pagan slavery was the denial of spiritual character, and even of moral responsibility, to the slave. Plato affirms that it is of small importance whether the slave lives a moral or immoral life. The slave was held to be a non-religious intelligence ; and so was supposed to be incapable of being bound by an oath. The writings of the New Testament shew how, immediately on the reception of the Christian faith, such conceptions were repudiated. In Christ Jesus there was neither bond nor free. The slave was Christ's freeman, as the master was a bondsman of Christ ; they were brethren one of another. By and by, slaves became preachers ; they were called to high office in the churches ; even bishoprics were sometimes held by slaves. Church rulers, moreover, were often called on to consider slavery in

relation to church discipline. These matters were discussed, and decrees arrived at in reference to them, in many a council; and one principle is consistently affirmed throughout, that the slave is as truly redeemed as his master, their relations to Christ are precisely the same.

We see in Christian literature how such a changed state of feeling operated to bring about the abrogation of the system of slavery. Men could not endure to hold in social bondage others who were equal to themselves in all that is essential to manhood; superior, it might be, in spiritual gifts. In exactly the same way were abolished in England, first the slave trade, and afterwards slavery itself; and thus American slavery fell. The Christian consciousness anticipated and compelled an alteration in the customs and laws of Christendom. They are but poor students of history who, in contravention of these statements would remind us that the churches in America held the lawfulness of slavery; and that Lincoln's decree of abolition was a stroke of policy. The moral feeling of a community is the spring of all its great social changes: the overthrow of American, as of Roman, slavery was due to the impossibility of reconciling the system with the mind of Christ in His people.

c. The cosmopolitan idea—the doctrine, viz., of social obligation to strangers as well as to our fellow-countrymen; the doctrine that just as individuals are bound to regard the rights of the community as well as the rights of themselves and their families, so are nations bound to regard the rights of other nations and only to seek national interests consistently with those of the whole world—is fast becoming a great political idea, destined to change all international

life. This sentiment found its first home in the Church ; it is the direct outcome of the Christian belief in the common redemption of mankind ; in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian nor Scythian. The lot of a stranger in the ancient world was no easy one ; suggestions of hardship, exposure to cruelty and caprice, endured by residents in a land whose laws did not protect them, underly the touching references to the treatment of the stranger in the Mosaic law. "*Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him : for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.*" Under the Empire, a man, unless he were a Roman citizen, or under treaty rights, was outside the protection of the law when he left his own province ; he was at the mercy of the mob, exposed to private injustice ; there was no one to whom he might appeal against the oppression of rulers even though his liberty or life were menaced. The crime of Verres, against which Cicero inveighed, was that he had wantonly tortured and crucified, not a man, but a Roman citizen. In the churches, however, strangers found themselves at home. Jealousy of the foreigner gave place to the interest awakened by the presence of the believer from a foreign land, able to add to the wealth of Christian thought by the narration of his experience, and to enlarge the interests of provincial communities by stories of Christ's triumphs in other lands. One of the duties assigned to the officers of churches was to attend to the comforts of such travellers. "*A bishop,*" says Paul, "*must be given to hospitality.*"* "*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers :*" says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "*for thereby some have entertained angels un-
awares.*"† "*Beloved,*" says John, in special commendation

* I Tim. iii. 2.

† Heb. xiii. 2.

of the well-beloved Gaius, "*thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou settest thyself to do for brethren who are strangers.*"* The treatment of strangers, prisoners of war, and enemies who are also Christians, is a subject treated in many councils of the Church ; and there always appears the recognition of the brotherhood in Christ and the common redemption as the relation which must determine all others. It is only among Christian nations now that the cosmopolitan temper exists; it is one of the fruits of Christian belief and the Christian spirit.

I have chosen these three illustrations, out of many, of the benignity, and as it has proved, of the farsightedness of the Christian influence in civilisation; and I say the Christian consciousness is needed to explain the historic fact. The changed habit appears in secular history; we can trace the history back until we reach the time at which these changes begin to appear. We see the Christian belief concerning the religious equality of men and women, slave and freeman, foreigner and native, which would account for the changed habit; and in various Christian customs and writings revealing the Christian consciousness, we see that this Christian belief did actually operate to produce these alterations.

That the influence of the Christian beliefs has been benign and philanthropic, favourable to lofty morality and a large humanity, is undoubted; but may not the Christian beliefs have been associated with the growth of philanthropic sentiment in another way than as its cause? May not this sentiment be due to the development of humanity itself; the

* III John 5.

doctrinal beliefs being merely the crude form in which the true impulses of a generous human nature, existing in unlettered, unscientific and credulous people, have expressed themselves? in other words, may not the gospel be associated with the ethical movement of civilised humanity as many a true thought has been associated with the legendary form in which it sought to express itself? the Christian doctrinal belief being only the image, the superstition which the moral impulse has assumed, doomed to die away and leave the simple ethical truth behind?

The Christian consciousness supplies the answer to this question. Nothing is more certain from the study of internal Christian history than that the religious belief has been uniformly in advance of the ethical conception. The moral doctrine has been a deduction from the religious faith. Again and again, the Church has had to be converted to a new and more generous moral creed; and the only argument strong enough to overcome its conservatism has been that drawn from the doctrine of Christ.

There are two other facts which I would cite in further illustration. The 18th century was characterised in Europe by a marked indifference to the truths of the gospel. Scepticism was alive and alert; what was worse, formalism prevailed in the churches, which were content to profess Christianity, and utter Christian words from which the life, the "savour," the special consciousness of the Christian creed had gone. The 18th century was one marked by much activity in political speculation, and sentimentalising over "the rights of man;" but little earnest philanthropic endeavour. There came over England and America—to

say nothing of Protestant Germany—a great evangelical revival; and the result has been the large philanthropic agencies of this century. The names associated with the most eminent achievements are the names of eminent Christian believers—Howard with prison cleansing; Mrs. Fry with prison visitation; Clarkson and Wilberforce with the anti-slavery agitation. Even a movement apparently so political as the repeal of the corn-laws drew its inspiration from the Christian impulse and owed much of its success to Christian men.

Then, too, it is most difficult for secular philanthropy to keep alive the sense of philanthropic obligation in its disciples. One of the first results of modern unbelief, (as of unbelief in all periods of Christian history) has been the indulgence of strange speculations concerning the relation of the sexes; the tendency to treat with contempt the legal sanctions of marriage; the announcement that purity and chastity are different, even separable, things. The philanthropic secularism of to-day has originated no new developments of active philanthropic purpose; it cannot even keep alive the zeal which its disciples bring with them from the Christian society in which they have been trained. One of the bitterest lamentations of earnest secularists, here and there, is that secularist communities make no effort, endure no self-denial, engage in no course of self-sacrifice for the moral elevation of their fellows; they can talk, but they do nothing and give nothing. The Christian consciousness is confirmed by the non-Christian consciousness. If any fact in social science is well established, it is this—all that is most precious in Christian ethics is due to the special beliefs of the gospel.

11. And now, for a little, think of the present Christian consciousness and its testimony, not to beliefs, but to the relation of man to God ; His timely help, the reality of inspiration, energy given us from supernatural sources.

The word " conversion " is not an old world term, from which all the meaning is departed ; a large proportion of Christian believers would declare themselves to have been converted. Some of them would be able to relate the time, the circumstances, the struggles ; indelibly is written upon their heart all that relates to their passing from darkness to light. And those who cannot circumstantially recall whatever had to do with the great change see no reason to drop the word ; for they are conscious of an energy in them not of themselves ; they know they are receiving power from above, and that that power is their security, the secret of their persistence in the Christian way. The variety of Christian experience only serves to illustrate and confirm this argument. The Christian consciousness does not follow an order of physical condition, or bodily temperament ; of intellectual development or moral sensibility ; of social influences or even of religious training : it is independent of all these, its relation to these is various, it obeys an order of its own.

Men can tell you, moreover, how they received enlightenment and Christian wisdom. Some practical Christian truth has been hard to apprehend ; they have waited on God for light, and light has come. Some gracious spiritual truth has seemed far out of the range of their personal apprehension. They have accepted it in words, seen its reasonableness ; but something has still been wanting. They have asked that it might be revealed to

them ; and the revelation has been vouchsafed. The growing power of believers in the apprehension of truth is still a fact in the Christian consciousness ; evidences of the growing hold of truth on the spirit appear in the firmness of the believer's language and in changes which pass upon his character. You note how a friend is coming, more and more, to use with familiarity and force the language of the gospel ; from being a trembling repeater of a lesson he has learnt he comes to evince the freshness and originality of one who knows that of which he is speaking. You mark a change from indifference to earnestness ; from partial and inconsistent Christian living to thoroughness and self-devotion. You see the changes ; the man will give you the explanation ; it is that God is with him ; Christ has helped him ; he has the aid of the Holy Spirit.

The man who is unacquainted with these facts, and such as these, is not in a condition to pronounce judgment as to whether anything can or cannot be known of God. Men may know them if they will. On an experience of this kind, much more than on evidences from prophecy and miracle and history, the living faith of Christendom sustains itself ; on the Christian consciousness, much more than on arguments, the faith of Christian men and women rests. No one who believes in the efficacy of prayer needs be staggered at the gospel miracles : in prayer we supplicate a supernatural succour ; when prayer is answered the supernatural succour comes ; and if we know prayer to be answered, we know that there is an intelligence, a will, a heart ruling and guiding the course of nature. How may we know if prayer is answered ? I answer, if we have no experience of this, we may listen to the testimony of others. Their experience can

never become ours, nor stand in the room of ours. It may save us from rejecting on *a priori* grounds a faith so sustaining, so consistent, so wholly reasonable as the Christian.

I say, so consistent and so wholly reasonable, as well as so sustaining. A system is reasonable when all its parts are intelligibly linked together, and the system as a whole can be seen to be consistent with facts and relations already apprehended by our reason. I have tried to shew you that the faith of the gospel is so. All its parts are self-consistent: the history, the teaching, and the Christian consciousness: all is consistent too with what history makes us acquainted with of the facts and relations of human life, into the narrative of which the Christian history enters as an integral and important part.

Even Christian consciousness, however, cannot take the place of Christian faith. Nothing but faith brings us into living contact with the living God. But our consciousness can declare that the promises and hopes of the gospel are realised in our experience; and reason can pronounce on the consistency between the alleged promises and the alleged experience. Such an experience is ever adding firmness to our faith: it is the body which the faith inspires; the body which carries all the senses through which the soul communicates with the world. And, brethren, this Christian consciousness may be our own. May God help you all to seek and to find the "life" which is "the light of men"; the light which "lighteth every man" by its "coming into the world."



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